

Girls Hit Back

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Summary: Kansas is attacked. (Multi-Person Narrative; follows "Time and Distance")

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> <meta name="Generator"> Disclaimer: Bellisario + CBS= Ownership of all our favorite characters **__**_-

**Disclaimer: **Bellisario + CBS= Ownership of all our favorite characters. Me + over active imagination=Kansas McWilliams. Any questions? Go back to JAG math 101.

**Author's Notes: **Okay, Clayton's been beaten and bloodied enough. Kansas gets her turn now. This follows after "Time and Distance" by about three weeks.

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Girls Hit Back

By Gayle F. Cox-Moffet

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"Girls hit back, Clayton, and we hit hard."

She told me that once. Actually, more than once; I loved to hear her say it because of the fire she put behind it.

And now here I am, sitting in one of those always uncomfortable hospital recliners in a lemon yellow room, praying she'll make any sort of sound. I've seen Kansas in many different stages of movement, and the problem here is that there is total lack thereof.

Kansas is still. Eerily, silently, still, and it's not right. This is a woman that I spend almost six months of my life with on a day to day basis, and I've never seen her so still. Even when she's sleeping she moves more than this.

I heard the door open, and I saw Rabb leaning against the frame.
"Change?"

"None."

He sighed and moved into the room, stopping at the side of her bed.
"She never seemed this small."

"She never got the shit beat out of her with a baseball bat." I saw the glare in my direction and matched him with an even stare. "Kansas would never say it with any less tactlessness."

"Probably true." Harm let one hand reach for hers, and I wished I could do the same.

I had barely touched her since I got the phone call three days ago. Some part of my brain was refusing to get that close to her when she wasn't her.

Kansas just isn't this still.

*

Alan came into my office with the Chinese cartons preceding him.
"Peace offering."

I gave him something between a growl and an exhausted sigh. "Accepted only because I'm starving."

He smiled and settled across the desk, passing me a carton. "Kung Pow Chicken; extra spicy."

"Thanks."

"Did you just thank me?" Alan pretended to choke on his beef and broccoli.

"Eat your lunch and fill me in on the mission plan."

He didn't need to ask which mission plan. The peace offering was the result of a morning spent arguing over how to get a group of agents out of hostile territory in Africa. We'd had a yelling match over whether or not we should send in another team to retrieve the first.

"Unfortunately, you were right. Sending in another team is just going to get more complicated, so we've started negotiations."

God, if there's anything I hate more than sending in teams after teams, it's negotiations. My groan went unnoticed as I asked the needed question. "What do they want?"

"More money than we've got."

"Again?"

Cogan smiled evilly. "No one ever said hostiles were imaginative."

Before I could come up with an imaginative response to that quip, my phone rang. "Webb."

"Clayton Webb?" It was a woman who sounded tired.

"Yes, Clayton Webb. Can I help you?"

"Kansas McWilliams was brought to St. Peter's twenty minutes ago unconscious, and we found your name and number in her purse."

"What happened to her?" I didn't hear my voice change, but apparently it did, because Cogan was suddenly disinterested in his Chinese.

"What's wrong?"

I waved off his whisper. "What happened to her?"

"I'm afraid I can't give that information over the phone. Right now I'm trying to locate next of kin."

"I'm the closet you've got, Miss. Her family is all in Kansas."

"Could you come in and fill out some paperwork then?"

"Yes." I hung up the phone without waiting for an answer and grabbed my jacket.

Alan put a hand on my shoulder as I reached for the door. "What's going on?"

"Kansas is at St. Peter's unconscious. I have to fill out paperwork."

"What about the mission?"

"Screw the mission; she's in the hospital." I hurried out the door without glancing back to gauge his response.

*

I found out when I got there and filled out the necessary paperwork that Kansas had been beaten with a baseball bat; a metal baseball bat. We still had dinner once a week, even if we were no longer a couple, and she had mentioned the new guy to me.

"Don't look so stricken, Clayton. He's just a guy I'm seeing."

"I was just the guy you were seeing."

"Yes, six weeks ago. We've only been out on three dates, and he's fun, but that's all I'm saying right now."

"How long have you known him?"

"A few months, but we never went out before because I had this completely overprotective boyfriend at the time." Her smile was soft, and it took any bite out of the words.

I had smiled in return and pretended to think over what she'd said.
"Was there someone else you hadn't told me about?"

Kansas is beautiful at deadpan when the occasion calls for it. "Yes, a tall, blonde, Nordic man named Sven. We did naughty things when you weren't looking."

"How did you know I wasn't looking?"

"Clayton, if I were dating a tall, blonde, Nord, I wouldn't care who was looking."

I had allowed myself the same teasing smile she'd given me a minute before. "Yes, you would. Even you're not that uninhibited, Kansas."

"Not that you know of."

Before I could swallow my tongue at the look she was giving me, I changed the subject. "What's the flavor of the week like?"

"I love how you keep the venom out of your voice, Clayton." Once again, the deadpan she does so well. "He's sweet, and a good conversationalist -"

"So's my mother."

"Your mother is not sweet, Clayton." I didn't get a chance to act indignant. "He's a little wary of my job and all the traveling, but I really don't think it's going to be a problem."

"It better not be if he knows what's good for him." I touched my eye slightly.

She had laughed at the implication. "Come on, Clayton, at least I didn't break your nose."

*

That conversation happened a little over a week ago, and I can only imagine what James the sweet conversationalist had to do with Kansas lying in a hospital bed.

I admit it; I'm suspicious of people. It's part of the job, but I get extremely suspicious when my ex-girlfriend goes out with the greatest man she's ever known just six weeks after we stop dating. Hell, I'm not perfect, I admit it, but Kansas is not one to fall madly in love on first sight.

"First site love doesn't exist, Clayton. You don't love someone until you know them. The first time you see someone, it's infatuation."

She's a cynic, but at one time she was my cynic.

Now, she's lying in a hospital bed with tubes in every open space,

and I've spent the last three days just sitting here, not sure what to do.

Rabb's still by her side and he glances over at me. "You look horrible."

"And you're impeccable." The sarcasm in my voice I ignore. He really does look bad. "You been sleeping here, or something?"

His uniform is wrinkled, the beige shirt and pants look like they haven't been changed in days. Odds are, they haven't. He's a self-assured, always wants to be right, pain in my neck sometimes, but Harm sees Kansas as a little sister. If she's hurt, odds are bed and rest haven't been his first thoughts.

Just don't let him know I said that, or I'd live it down somewhere between never and when hell freezes.

God, I wish she'd move.

*

I can hear him when he moves around the room. That thing they say about being able to hear when you're in a coma is true. Everything he did I could hear.

Clayton thinks somehow that this is his fault. That my own stupidity and blindspot make it his fault. I don't know if he's really that egotistical or just has a guilt complex.

Probably a guilt complex, and one that's getting worked way too much today, and yesterday, and the day before that. It was my own fault to go against my own theory on love at first sight, or at least love on the first date.

I never believed in it. Plenty of people like to believe that what Clayton and I had was love at first sight. Hardly. I blacked the man's eye because he was arrogant, not because I was acting like a fourth-grader that punches the guy in the arm to prove I like him.

Then I tell Clayton we have to stop, and we do, and then I went out with James. James himself was a nice guy. Sweet, open, and very honest; very much the opposite of a certain spy. Well, maybe not completely. Clayton has a sweetness buried in him, but the arrogance he throws around to protect himself tends to overshadow it.

Yes, I'm well aware that the arrogance is just an act, and I'm also aware that he hasn't touched me more than three times since he barreled into the room with a nurse yelling at him from behind.

*

"Sir, you can't go in there! Sir!"

I heard the nurse and knew it was Clayton. No one else could get that level of exasperation to come out in someone's voice.

The door squeaked on its hinges, and I wanted to be able to open my

eyes to see his face, but my mind wouldn't let me. Why am I always so stubborn when I don't need to be? In my mind I could see him, but it wasn't the him I knew was standing over my bed.

He was smiling in my head. The smile that Mac calls his "Bond" smile. It's all charm, and he swears that until he met me it had the same effect as gold wings and dress whites.

I reminded him that the old "gold wings and dress whites" saying was just that-old.

In my head, he was in the white and taupe suit that I first saw him in when he came back from Australia, and his hair is in a style that reminds me of Bobby Kennedy. He wore it like that one day after I told him it looked good, and every now and then, I can still cajole him into doing it another time.

God, I wish I could open my eyes. I know his face is strained, and I can hear him mumbling under his breath at the sight of me. I'm well aware I look like a version of Barney the Dinosaur. I can practically feel the green and purple marks on my body, but I need to see them. I need to convince myself that I'm still here, even if it hurts like nothing else.

I wish I could open my eyes.

*

The coffee here sucks.

In spite of the complete exhaustion that's trying to take me over, I have to smile at the fact that part of Kansas' vocabulary has turned into mine now. Every now and then a word slips out that's completely out of my control.

A white hat thumped down on the table, and I glanced up to find Chegwidden glaring down at me. So much for a few minutes of quiet.

"If you're going to break my nose, could you give me a chance to duck? The last time you hit me the surgery was a bitch."

He didn't say anything; he just kept glaring.

"You know glaring like that can make your eyesight go bad."

Finally, he breathed out and bent down to get nose to nose with me. "How in hell could you let this happen?"

Oh, goody, I get the blame. Big shock, let me tell you. "How could I know it was going to happen?"

"You're supposed to watch out for her."

"Sorry, AJ, but I didn't get that memo."

He slammed his hand down on the table, sloshing my coffee around and making everyone within ten feet look over in curiosity. "You're supposed to look out for her."

Three days of next to no sleep plus the thousand questions as to why Kansas was in a hospital looking like one giant bruise had taken their toll on me, and I wasn't going to put up with a psychotic AJ Chegwidden.

"I'm supposed to be her friend, AJ. We broke up. Remember that? That means that my worrying about where she's at and who she's with doesn't have to be the fore front thought in my mind."

"Liar."

God, I hate it when people see through me. Especially when it's someone who's broken my nose more than once.

AJ leaned in closer. "She's not with you all the time anymore, and you worry more because she's not. That makes you the person who's supposed to watch her. Where were you?"

"Apparently not with her."

I didn't see the hand that yanked at my shirt collar until I was standing on my toes.

"Do you think this is funny?"

"There are only two people in this world that I trust completely, AJ. One gave birth to me, and the other is now laying half-dead in a hospital bed three floors up from this concrete hell they call a cafeteria. I can give you a list of adjectives that describe this situation starting with hellish and gut-wrenching, but I would never use the word funny."

I glanced down at his hand at my collar and then at the people around us. "Unless you want to explain to hospital security why you have me hovering on the floor, it would be a good idea to put me down."

He clenched my collar tighter for a second before letting go and letting me fall back into my seat. "You're supposed to watch out for her."

"I don't remember signing a contract."

"Webb, you're an idiot if you think I don't see through the glass wall you're putting up. You're in love with her even if you two aren't a couple anymore."

I grimaced; I never used to be so transparent. "So what if I am?"

"You better pull your head from your ass before I shove it up there permanently." His voice was about an octave above a growl. "Kansas is lying in a bed, in a coma, and I really believe there to be only one person here who can help her."

"Yes, her doctor."

"Glass walls are see-thorough, Clayton."

Did he just use my first name? AJ hates to use my first name, and he hates it even more when I use his. Which is probably the main reason

I use it so often. "Could you just make your point and leave, AJ?"

He picked up his hat, straightened his posture and glared down at me. "My point is that the one woman with enough determination or stupidity to ever give you a chance past the first impression needs to be reminded that the same person who climbed the Einstein statue with her is next to her talking her out of the pain she's in."

He knew about the Einstein statue? Lovely. I sighed and rubbed my hands with my face. "If I go back up and try to talk to her will you not try to pull the back of my shirt through my neck?"

AJ put his hat on his head and straightened it to the perfection that only a career Navy man could do. "Only if you do it right." He turned to walk away.

"If you're expecting a salute you're not going to get it." I had to get the last word.

"I don't want a salute; I want you to be a decent human being."

Chegwidden was out the door before I could respond.

I hate when he wins, and the coffee here is even worse cold.

*

Yes, I'm protective of my people, but I'm also an ex-Seal, and Seals never leave a man behind.

Or a woman as the case may be. Kansas got left behind somewhere, and she showed up looking worse than I've ever felt.

I just had a very hard confrontation with Webb. As much as I hate to admit it, Kansas loves him and he loves her, and they need each other. Ugh. I shudder to think of the mouth on their children. Between the two of them, the kid would have a quicker wit than was good for him or her.

Webb looks like death frozen over. I don't think he's changed suits since he got here, and I don't want to get close enough to see if he's showered. Yes, I got close, but I didn't inhale.

God, now I sound like the President.

She looks incredibly pale against the sheets. Kansas is never pale, or small, or so quiet. To think I actually wanted her quiet sometimes. I take it back; silence, thy name is not Kansas.

It probably seems odd that I worry this much over one of my people, but this **is** one of **my** people. I worry over all of them, maybe some more than others, and maybe the women a little more than the men, but they're all mine in the end.

The door squeaked, and I looked up to see Webb in the doorway.

"I thought about what you said."

My 'Iron-Fist-Admiral' voice was the one to come out. "And?"

He leaned against the door, the lines on his face becoming suddenly clear. "And you might be right."

"Might?"

Suddenly, the secret agent voice that declared no one but he would win, spoke out. "If I told you you were right I'd never hear the end of it."

"Webb, would you get in here and talk to her?" I felt my patience wearing thin and started to step from the room.

"Thanks, AJ."

It was so quiet, I almost didn't hear it. "You're welcome. She's one of mine, Clayton, but she's not invincible." I clapped him on the shoulder and got out of there fast. I had a lump in my throat; I needed to find some water.

*

Oh, God, the Admiral is using that voice that he usually reserves for yelling out Tiner when he needs to let off some steam. It's the only voice that makes me wince because of the even tone of it. The Admiral is not an even talking person.

Clayton's saying something back to him, but I don't feel like concentrating and making the words out. I all I really hear is his mumble of 'never hear the end of it'. My mind doesn't want to imagine what they've been discussing that has Clayton smarting off and the Admiral using that voice.

The Admiral left, I think he did, anyway, because I don't hear him anymore. I can't wait to come out of this so I can open my eyes and know for sure if someone's left or not. Harm scared the crap out of me the last time he was here because he was quiet for so long, I'd assumed he left.

"Hi." Clayton's voice is soft, and he sounds scared.

I wish there was a way for me to respond to him. Just lying here doesn't do much good.

"You realize this is wrong, don't you, Kansas? I'm supposed to be the one in a bed with tubes and bruises. It's part of my job."

Apparently no one has ever informed Clayton that Marines get thrown around on a regular basis. What I wouldn't do to be able to argue the point with him.

"I don't want to imagine you on the floor bleeding while some bastard comes after you with a baseball bat."

I didn't want to imagine it either, but it happened.

"The doctor says you broke three ribs, two more got cracked; your left shoulder was dislocated, your right ankle got a hairline

fracture, and your brow bone above your right eye was cracked. They had to do surgery to fix your femur bone; the surgeon had to put in a metal rod, so you'll be in a wheelchair for awhile."

That explains why I'm in a coma. With the injuries I have, I'm glad I'm not awake.

"I know I shouldn't be listing off your injuries, but you'd want to know what to expect when you woke up."

Clayton knows me to well. I've never really had someone who could pinpoint what I'd want before I came out of a coma. Of course, I've never been in a coma before. I hope I'm never in one again.

He leaned down, and I felt his kiss on my forehead. "I'm going to go home and change, but I'll be back in a couple of hours."

I listened as he walked to the door, and then it squeaked as he stepped into the hall. I hope no one oils that door when I'm here; it's the only way I'm going to know when someone comes in.

*

"Hey, Clayton."

My head jerked up as I stepped into my apartment. Alan sat in one of the leather armchairs looking completely at home.

"Alan, If I want a heart attack I'll give you the syringe full of air and impale myself on the needle."

"You mean I wouldn't get the chance to stick you myself?"

I was half-tempted to throw him out the window, but then I saw the concern come out on his face. "I'm fine, Alan."

"Pardon me for seeing through that lie. You look dead, Clayton."

My suit jacket was thrown on the couch, and I headed back to the bedroom. "I just spent the last three days and nights watching a hospital bed hold onto someone that shouldn't be there. I think looking like death is okay under the circumstances."

Alan leaned against the doorjamb and watched me as I threw my vest, tie, and shirt onto the bed. "Clayton, you could throw on a black robe, put a sickle in your hand, and no one would know the difference."

"I'm going to shower. You know the way out."

"How is she?"

"Unconscious and about forty shades of purple." I pulled a towel from the bathroom closet and started the water running.

"She still hasn't woken up?"

"No."

"What have the doctor's said?"

"That she took and beating, and it's not surprising that she hasn't woken up."

"Would you mind taking two seconds to look at me and talk to me instead of smarting off to hide the fact that you're exhausted and scared she's not going to come out of it?" Alan's voice held a note of exasperation.

I tensed up. "Would you just get out?"

"Would you just quit playing tough and talk some stuff out?"

"You sound like Kansas."

"Maybe that's what you need right now."

Damn him, he's right, and if I weren't so tired I might actually fight it. "It's exactly what I need, but I need it in the five foot, redhead variety. Not the five-ten blonde variety."

"I'll dye my hair and stand on my knees."

"Won't work, you don't kiss like her."

Alan's eyebrows shot up in mock-surprise. "How would you know how I kiss?"

"The CIA keeps national secrets; that doesn't mean that who goes out with who in the office stays a secret." I stepped into the shower and pulled the curtain shut.

"Maybe so, but you still need to talk."

"Yes, Alan, I need to talk, I need to share my feelings, and I need to remind myself everyday that I'm a person worth knowing. Can you at least wait until I'm *out* of the shower?" My temper was thin going on anorexic.

"Fine. I'll be in your living room. Do you have coffee?"

Leave it to Alan to put his caffeine addiction at the top of things to do. "In the cupboard."

The door shut, and I looked around the shower curtain to make sure Alan was gone. Then I cried.

*

In the cupboard the man tells me. Coffee's in the cupboard. Do you know how many cupboards Clayton Webb has in his kitchen? I counted sixteen.

Before I could go insane and start digging through the kitchen, I noticed something on the cupboard doors. They were little strips of adhesive that almost blended into the wood, but when I leaned in, I had to smile.

Labels on the doors, and they were all in Kansas' handwriting. Amazing how her presence is still around even after they've broken

up. I found the coffee, put it in the pot, and took another look around the apartment.

When I first came in, thanks to the lockpicks in my jacket pocket, it looked as it had before Kansas. An apartment for a man who wanted to entertain, but wasn't looking for a full-time commitment. At least he wasn't until he almost ended up dead on that ship.

After the whole thing with Palmer and the super-conductor, Clayton started settling down. The blonde who's picture used to grace his coffee table was scrapped when he reevaluated the relationship and found it is was all physical and none personal.

For a while, I got to hear stories of the new women; executives, teachers, a few that his mother set him up with that ended horribly, and then he came to work with one hell of a black eye.

*

I had come in early to finish some paperwork for a mission that had gone down the week before, and I barely glanced up as Clayton hurried past my door to his own office. He came in early often enough that it didn't warrant me to wonder if he was feeling all right.

My secretary, Lydia, stepped into my office. "Did Webb just run by?"

"Yes."

"Did he have a black eye?"

That made me forget the paperwork. "Excuse me?"

Lydia motioned down the hall. "When he ran by, it looked like he had a black eye."

I got up from my desk. "I'll go ask." In my head I was trying to figure out who had gotten the drop on Clayton. The man was fantastic at hand-to-hand, and it was rare when someone was able to touch him before Webb dropped them to the ground.

The man in question sat at his desk, a file open and his left hand cupped around his forehead. I knocked on the doorjamb.

"Go away."

"Not until I see the evidence."

"Cogan, I'll shoot you where I sit." He still hadn't looked up.

"Who hit you?" Oh, I was enjoying this way too much.

Finally, the hand came down, Clayton looked up, and I whistled under my breath in sympathy. "Who hit you?"

He attempted to glare at me around the swelled, purple, green, and gray flesh that was once his eye, and winced at the pain. "Someone with a good jab."

"It was a woman."

"Yes, it was a woman."

"I told you to get some new pick up lines."

The glare-attempt happened again. "Leave."

"Who is she? Tell me she's little."

"Five feet nothing."

Oh, this was the stuff drunken Christmas party stories are made of.
"What'd you say?"

"Nothing."

"So a woman came up to you, looked you over, and hit you?"

"Yes."

"What'd you say?"

"Nothing."

"Clayton, you had to say something. I don't know many women who would just haul out and hit you."

"I told her she couldn't do it."

"You told her she couldn't hit you?"

"Yes." He wouldn't meet my gaze.

"Then she blacked your eye."

"Yes."

I started laughing, ignoring the glare Clayton was attempting to give me again, and I laughed harder. "You got that shiner from someone half your size because you told her she couldn't do it?"

"Yes. Would you mind pretending this wasn't so hilarious?"

"Yes, I would. If you'll excuse me, I'm going to laugh now." I ran from the office, dodging the pen that flew by my ear.

*

The coffee was perking as I came out of that memory. Irony is a funny thing. It took Clayton getting nailed for them to come together in the first place, and now Kansas' injuries were pulling them back towards each other. Apparently, they're both masochists.

Clayton came out of the bedroom, and gave me a look. "Take a hint, Alan."

"I do that enough at work. You want coffee?"

He sat in a chair at the table and shrugged. "What the hell; I need

to get something into me."

"How about something other than vending machine Twinkies?"

"I lived on those Twinkies through college."

"That was college, this is you at thirty-five." The phone rang on the wall beside me, and I glanced at Clayton.

"Get it. I don't want to talk to anyone."

"Clayton Webb's residence." I listened for a minute and gave a silent thanks to whoever up above was watching out for CIA agents and the women they loved. "Thank you."

"Clayton, she's awake."

*

I don't know how many movies and television shows I've seen that show the people coming out of a coma flutter open their eyelashes, and then smile when their blurred vision clears up after a couple of minutes.

I can tell you right now that's complete bull.

When I started to come to, it wasn't all eye flutters and tired smiles. It was an ongoing battle to get my eyes open. Then it was another battle to keep them open, and to get them to focus.

The first thing I saw was the top of a dark head, but it wasn't the dark head I wanted. My mouth was too dry for me to speak, so I thumped the bed.

Harm's head jerked up, and when he saw my eyes open, he smiled broadly. "Water?"

I thumped the bed again. Here's another lie they let you believe in the movies-nodding happens instantly. No, it doesn't. It felt like my head weighed fifty pounds. I wasn't going to move it until absolutely necessary.

He held the straw, and I sucked down half the glass while Harm reached above my head to hit the call button for the nurse.

"Can you talk now?"

"Clayton?" My voice sounded like sandpaper against tarpaper. Lovely sound.

Harm glanced at his watch. "He went home to shower a little over an hour ago. When the nurse gets here I'll go call him."

I blinked and forced my eyes open again. I wasn't going to sleep until I saw Clayton. "Okay."

"You tired?"

"Yeah."

The nurse came in, saw me awake and moved to take my pulse. "Welcome back to the land of the living, Ms. McWilliams."

"Major."

"Excuse me?"

"She's a Major in the Marine Corps." Harm filled in for me while moving to the door. "I'll go call Clay."

I tried to say thanks, but my throat was dry again. The nurse noticed and he held the glass for me. "Your vital signs are strong, though we were worried for awhile; you got pretty mangled."

"Metal baseball bats tend to do that." Good to know my sarcastic streak wasn't harmed.

"The doctor will want to know what happened."

So would the cops and everyone I know, but I just waved it off weakly. "Fine." I blinked and fought against sleep again.

"I'll get the doctor. Will you be alright?"

Good God, I wasn't breakable; I was just extremely beaten. "Fine."

The nurse exited, and I stared at the wall across from me. It was Twinkie yellow and ugly as hell. The door opened, and Harm moved to the side of my bed.

"Clayton's on his way. Alan's with him. I told the Admiral and Mac you were awake; they'll come in later. They decided to give you a little time to get re-oriented."

"How kind."

"Do you need more water?"

I nodded that time and was relieved that no headache followed the movement. Another gulp of water later, and I spoke again. "How's traffic?"

"Traffic?"

"On the beltway?"

"Clay'll be here in twenty minutes. Ten if he breaks any speed limits."

"Keep me awake?"

Harm smiled at me and resumed his spot in the chair. "I'll try."

*

She's awake? Kansas is awake?

I glanced up at Alan in disbelief. "She's awake?"

"Unless Harm is playing an incredibly cruel joke, yes, she's awake."

Grabbing my keys off the table, I was two steps from the door when Alan touched my arm. "What?"

"Where are you going?"

"Wild guess, but I'd say the hospital."

"In your car?"

I wondered if cold-cocking him would make him less stupid. "I was planning to ride Hakeem the invisible giraffe, but I thought it would look weird to go down the highway in mid-air."

"I'm in a company car." Alan held up the keys. "We're less likely to get pulled over."

My keys were thrown back on the table. "You drive."

*

Alan was right, we sped the entire way to St. Peter's, and the four cops we passed didn't blink an eye. Nice to know all it takes to break a law is the right plates on a car.

I ran to the entrance and hit the elevators with Alan at my heels. We rode up in silence, but I couldn't stop myself from bouncing on the toes of my shoes. It took me two floors before I noticed the look I was getting from an older woman next to me.

She smiled and spoke softly so I had to lean in to hear her. "She must be special."

"Who?"

"Whoever has you bouncing around like that. You don't do that often do you?"

I didn't get a chance to reply as the door dinged, and I stepped from the elevator.

"Good luck."

I spun around trying to get a better look at the woman, but the doors were already closed.

"You okay, Clayton?" Alan was watching me as I stared at the doors.

"Fine, just had a weird moment on the elevator."

"Lack of sleep does that."

Alan ignored my glare as his cell phone rang, and I brushed past him to Kansas' room. I opened the door and saw Rabb at the side of the bed.

He glanced up as the door closed behind me. "Hey, Clay."

"Hi." I stood over the bed and smiled at the half-awake picture Kansas made on the bed. "You can go to sleep now."

She smiled and tapped the bed. I sat and took her hand. Another smile, and she was closing her eyes. I got comfortable, promising not to leave until she woke up.

Harm glanced at me as he stood and stretched. "She insisted on staying awake until you got here."

"Thanks, Harm."

He raised his eyebrows. "And me without my tape recorder."

I just gave him a look and watched him move towards the door.

"You're welcome, Clay."

*

He made it. Clayton's sitting on the side of my bed, holding my hand, and telling me to go to sleep.

He made it.

God, I sound so sappy. Screw it. I'm allowed. After all we've been through in the last couple of months, I wasn't sure if he'd get here so quickly. On the other hand, he has been holding vigil by my bedside for the last few days. That's more than I can say for James.

Screw James; I was happy right where I was.

*

She woke up, and now she's asleep again, and I'm alone with her. I watched her as she lay there and breathed. There's a definite difference between Kansas comatose and Kansas sleeping. I was half-tempted to lay down beside her and fall asleep myself, but Alan just walked in.

He glanced at her, then at me, and then said a word that made me wish I had a weapon on me. "Palmer."

"What?"

Alan gestured to his cell phone. "That was Langley; Palmer got in and left you a note on your door."

"What did it say?"

"To bad she woke up; next time I'll finish what I started. The bat's with me."

I felt my chest tighten, and saw the room go from yellow to red.

I was going to kill the son of a bitch.

*

Finally, I'm free!

I kept the thought to myself as the nurse wheeled me out of the main entrance of the hospital. Clayton pulled up and jumped from the car. His hair was tousled from the roof being down, and he was wearing a gray t-shirt and jeans. Yes, I know it's a shock, but Clayton owns jeans and t-shirts, and he looks good in them.

"You ready to leave?"

"Get me out of here, and I'll buy you lunch."

He smiled and helped the nurse get me into the car. Once we were driving off, I turned to look at him. "You're not telling me something."

"I'm not talking right now."

"Clayton, you've been acting odd since I woke up four days ago. You're keeping something secret."

"Maybe I redecorated your apartment."

"And maybe you'll realize that this is the reason we broke up."

Yes, I know it's dirty pool, but I had to know what was bugging him. Clayton had been acting extremely cagey for the last few days, and I wanted to know why.

"I know that, but this is different."

"How is it different? You're still not opening up to me."

He gave me a sideways glance and then sighed in defeat. "Do you remember who attacked you?"

"No, I got a concussion, and the doctors' say that if I do remember, it'll probably be fuzzy. Why?"

I watched him take another deep breath, and I realized that he was stalling. I used that same technique. "Clayton?"

"Palmer was the one who attacked you, and he left a note on my office door that made it sound like he was going after you again."

For all the tough Marine attitude I ooze, I'm still human. I know who Palmer is; I also know what he's capable of, and my stomach turned into ice. "Palmer attacked me?"

"Yes."

"Oh, God." I felt faint and forced myself to breathe deeply.

Clayton pulled the car over and pulled me to him, careful of my injuries. "I won't let him touch you again, Kansas."

Maybe so, but he's already touched me once.

End
file.